

**Public Scoping of Issues
Broken Top Loop Trail Project
Craters of the Moon National Monument**

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to develop a 1.5 to 2.5 mile loop hiking trail incorporating both new and existing trail segments. The NPS invites public comment on this proposed project as it develops an environmental assessment. The objective of this proposal is to provide a safe educational field site for school groups and the general public. Existing loop trails lack the diverse interpretive features and educational benefits found in the Broken Top area. A secondary objective is to provide a longer loop trail for recreational hikers. None of the existing loop hiking trails within the monument exceed .5 miles in length. Portions of the existing Buffalo Caves Trail are very rough with numerous tripping hazards and sharp rocks protruding from the trail surface. The proposed project is located at the end of the Tree Molds spur road and is bounded on the north by Broken Top, on the south by Big Cinder Butte, the Wilderness Trail on the east, and the Tree Molds Trail on the west.

As initially proposed the loop trail would follow the existing Wilderness Trail from the trailhead east and then south to the junction with the undeveloped "Buffalo Caves Trail" and then return north via the latter route to the road. The project would involve three major construction components;

- 1) A pedestrian walk way from the Tree Molds parking area to the Wilderness Trailhead.
- 2) A spur trail from the Wilderness Trail to an overlook and wayside exhibit interpreting the Spatter Cones/Big Sink/Caves area.
- 3) Extensive improvement of a very rough 265' segment of the existing "Buffalo Caves" trail route or major realignment to a different route.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to assess the environmental impact of proposed projects and compare the environmental consequences of feasible alternatives. Thus far the following alternatives have been identified for possible analysis in an Environmental Assessment.

I. No Action - This would mean leaving things as they are now. We are required to assess this option for comparison with other alternatives.

II. An improved trail with the pedestrian walkway, Big Sink Overlook, and following all of the existing "Buffalo Caves" trail route. Significant trail construction using hand labor would be required to cross 265 feet of very rough lava. Total loop trail distance would be 1.7 miles.

III. Same as alternative II, except that 800 feet (beginning at the trailhead and running southeast) of the existing "Buffalo Caves" trail would be relocated to a new 850 foot route along the base of Broken Top. Significant trail construction using heavy mechanical equipment would be required to cross 800 feet of very rough lava boulders.

IV. Same as alternative II, except only a short spur of the existing "Buffalo Caves" trail from the Wilderness Trail to the Buffalo Caves would be used. Instead a new 1.1 mile segment of trail would be developed from the existing Wilderness Trail to the north side of Big Cinder Butte and then west and north to the Tree Molds parking area to create a longer 2.4 mile loop trail.

The NPS is inviting public comment on this proposed project as it develops an environmental assessment. Questions or concerns about this project or requests for a copy of the completed assessment may be addressed to:

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